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# The Reconstruction of Clifty

Community Affairs File

## Tornado Havoc Speeds State Park Modernization

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The targets of the unprecedented number of tornadoes which ravaged Indiana on April 4, 1974, included Clifty Falls State Park. Happily the restoration of the Park is proceeding more rapidly than was thought possible immediately after the disaster, although it will take many years for tree replacements to approach even the former forest stands at Clifty. Meanwhile, a realistic expansion program, based on the needs and realities of today, is being accelerated.

Clifty Falls is Indiana's third oldest State Park, having been founded in 1920. It now has 1,309 acres, high on a bluff overlooking the Ohio River, and extends down the Clifty Creek Valley from State Highway 107 to State Highway 56. It is just West of historic and scenic Madison, which delightful old city includes J. F. D. Lanier State Memorial.

[See *Outdoor Indiana,* May, 1967; February and November, 1969; March, 1970; February and March, 1973; September, 1975.]

The tornado which struck Clifty Falls State Park had already caused much death and destruction at Brandenburg, Kentucky. Then it hit Hanover College, which is to the Southwest of the Park. It proceeded across Southeastern Indiana into Ohio, also wreaking its ferocious force on Xenia, Ohio.

Again and again I have been asked to recount what happened at Clifty in those few terrible moments. This narration is based on my actual experiences, and what I saw after the storm had quickly passed.

It began as a normal April Wednesday afternoon. The rain had brought the workers in early and the task of cleaning up tools had begun. In the office the finalizing of requests for the upcoming fiscal year's budget was underway.

Suddenly the radio blared *Tornado Warning!* With the mentioning of Chelsea, Indiana, and the wind's Northeasterly heading, it soon became obvious that Clifty was in its path. Immediately all personnel ran to the rear garage door where the dark mass of clouds with swirling debris was approaching.

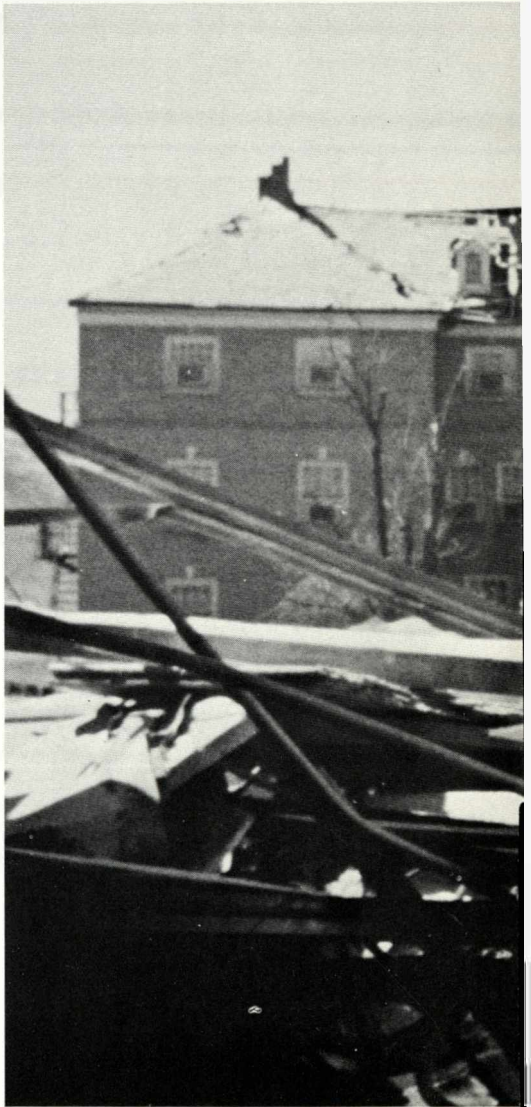
This scene was watched in a daze. Then came realization of the apparent danger. Refuge was taken against the side of the garage, and with rushing minds and mixed emotions the wait began.

The roar, like that of a dozen jet engines, and the cloud of debris it carried came hurtling past. The roof of the garage peeled away piece by piece, then by large sections. Out of the opening which the garage door once filled the massive concrete smoke stacks of our neighboring power plant were being watched. We awaited their yielding and feared the result.

As it began—suddenly—so it ceased. The earth-shaking roar seemed to remain. Apprehensively, one by one, individuals ventured out. Shocked and amazed, thankful and sorrowful, but with no injuries.

It was soon realized that the source of the continuing roar was the power plant generators which were freewheeling with loss of their electrical load. Inspection followed of what seemed a certain total loss, the lodge and hotel complex. Park personnel met individuals from the Lodge halfway between the buildings. Injury reports were exchanged. Neither had any. Thank God!

After a quick check was run on all persons who had registered at the Lodge, the campgrounds were next. Because of the sudden impact of the tornado and the very short warning from the radio, these people had to ride out the storm's fury without warning from Park officials.



Luckily, there were few campers staying in the campgrounds on this particular day. Park personnel ran, stumbled and climbed over uprooted trees and other debris to the point where the campers were met. Amazingly all were unhurt, but shaken to say the least.

At this time only several minutes had passed since the tornado had raked the area. All were made as comfortable as possible for it would



Outdoor Indiana Nov. 1975

**The Tornado Which Seriously Damaged Clifty Falls State Park on April 3, 1974, Smashed Beyond Repair the Old Clifty Inn, Familiar to Generations of Visitors. This Scene Was Taken from Amid the Wreckage of the Relatively New Clifty Dining Room.**

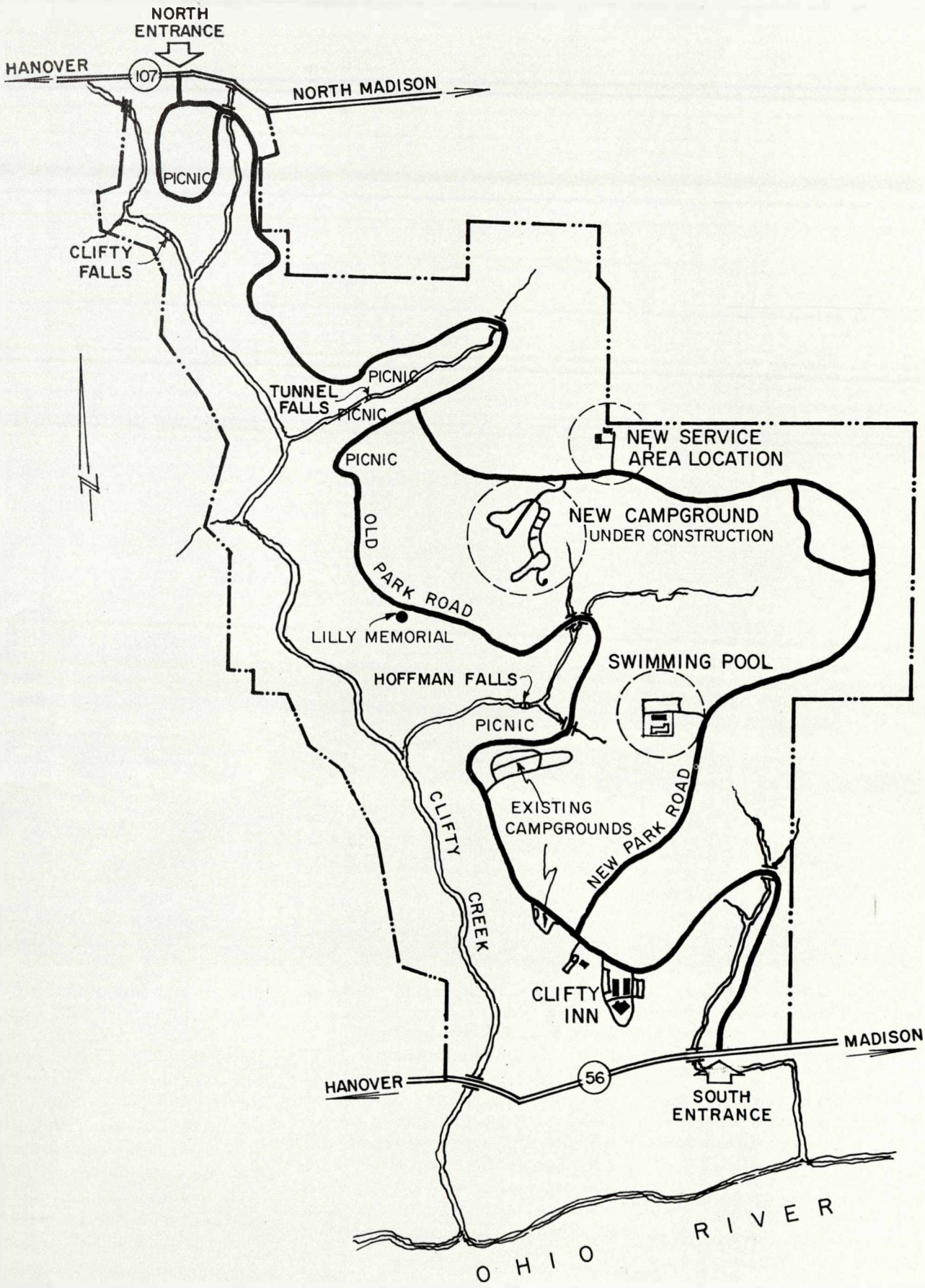
be a while before anyone could leave because the roads were completely impassable, even if any of the vehicles could still run.

The sights surrounding Clifty were frightful. They resembled those of a science fiction film. Search crews were organized to comb the area for any visitors who might have been in the Park.

As we resumed our inspection we found that the Clifty dining room was flattened. Pieces of steel beams were hurled across the East parking lot for 500 feet. All rooms of the Motel wings looked as though some giant hand had pushed all the contents out of the windows.

In the surrounding area of our garage were scattered the remains of our vehicles in weird contortions, intermixed and tangled with employees' automobiles. Brick, stone, lumber, gravel, bedding, kitchen equipment, and assorted puzzling pieces of neighboring properties were all stirred in with trees and the remains of utility poles. Inn guests' autos, campers, and furniture were intermixed with these items to form a path of destruction nearly one mile wide across the Park's Northeast section.

However, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources is proud to an-




**How Clifty Falls State Park Is Being Enlarged and Restored.**

**This Picture Was Taken Soon After the Tornado Ravaged the New Lounge to the East of the Inn's Dining Room.**

nounce that much tornado reconstruction has been accomplished by a year of diligent work by Department personnel, including men from several other State Parks and aided by many other State agencies. Concerned individuals also contributed unselfishly their time and skills. Thanks to these people and agencies Clifty again offers to the public a wide range of recreational facilities.

One gloomy consequence of the storm remains. Old Clifty Inn, built in 1929, met the fate of the demolition ball this spring due to the extensive damage done by the tornado. This is a sad ending for many couples who spent their honeymoons in this facility, as well as a disappointment to the thousands of people who enjoyed memorable vacations at the old Inn. Although the 45-year-old structure now is gone, new Clifty Motor Inn and Lodge is better than ever. The interiors of these facilities have been completely remodeled and the Inn's dining facilities resumed operation on April 4, 1975, exactly one year after the tornado.

Besides all this reconstruction the Park is progressing in other areas. The newly standardized informational sign program for all Indiana State Parks is being implemented for visitors' convenience. This sign program also points out new facilities being constructed at Clifty, such as the new swimming pool complex containing an "Olympic size" pool, bathhouse, and concession building. This facility, similar to the existing structure at McCormick's Creek State Park, was opened on July 4, 1975. Coinciding with this opening a small pool also opened for the use of Clifty Motor Inn guests.

For many years there has been a need for a larger and better Campground at Clifty. This need will be-

**Emergency Crews Immediately Began Clearing Debris Throughout the Park. Such Devastated Areas Are Being Reforested.**

come a reality next Summer. A new Family Campground also is under construction. This facility will have 107 Class A (modern) sites and 60 Class C (primitive) sites. It will also have two comfort stations with showers and modern restrooms.

All Indiana State Parks are open throughout the four seasons and therefore may be used for Winter activities.

Many people believe that Clifty is more beautiful when snow covered than at any other time of the year. The various waterfalls in the Park take on a special beauty during the Winter. Icy stalactites and stalagmites have awed many a camper who has bundled up and viewed the falls then. Winter campfires take on a new perspective, creating a comfortable atmosphere for family fun. Anyone for snow camping?

Another new facility to be added to Clifty is a service center, construction of which will begin soon. Damage by the tornado accented the need for this new building, which will serve as an information center for the public during working hours at the Park. The service building will be more centrally located than the old one in order to aid in management of the Family Campground and the swimming pool complex.

Horses are out at Clifty and a Nature Center is in! Because of extensive tornado damage to the saddle barn, horse trails, corrals, and riding ring, the salvage program includes converting of the saddle barn into a Nature Center. The Nature Center will serve as a headquarters for the free naturalist service which now is featured at all Indiana State Parks. Nature displays along with activities such as workshops and programs for Park visitors, will make this facility a mainstay in Cilfty's outdoor recreation program. While visiting Clifty, people are encouraged to come to this center and observe its new look. Nature movies and Nature shows are provided every week end.

The goal of this service is to assist people in developing respect for Nature and wildlife while learning by participation in schedule activities, as well as acting as an immediate resource contact for information.

An article about Clifty Falls would not be complete without mentioning the beautiful gorge cut deep in the sedimentary rock by Clifty and Little Clifty Creeks. Its natural beauty is unparalleled in this region, with its high walls reaching down bald-faced rock to the creek below. The trails outlining the gorge which reveal its breathtaking scenery are undergoing change also. New trail markers have been installed to correspond with the new Park Plan. (See Page 6.) Additional for the convenience and safety of Park visitors. Considerable time and materials have been devoted to these trails. Stairs are being repaired or newly constructed to enhance their appeal.

The some 11 miles of Park trails at Clifty offer a quality experience to visitors wishing to come closer to Nature. The enjoyment of an outing on such trails can be limited only by one's interests in the geological and natural areas. [See *Outdoor Indiana,* December, 1973.] Trail reconstruction is a slow and painstaking project which never ends because of the vast amount of work to be completed.

*Clifty's gorge and natural areas may create special hazards when visitors disregard regulations. Therefore, unsafe acts should be avoided for the visitors' own protection.*

With the major facilities added, Clifty Falls has a wide appeal for families planning vacations or outings. Any questions concerning the Park can be answered by calling the Division of State Parks in Indianapolis 317-(633-4197) or Clifty Falls State Park (812-263-3536).

**A New Swimming Pool Has Been Built Alongside the Motel Units at Clifty. A Much Larger New Pool Also Has Been Constructed Near the Park's Campgrounds. (See Map on Page 6.)**